# CATALOGUES OF ART EXHIBITIONS ORGANIZED BY THE ARTS COUNCIL OF GREAT BRITAIN REPUBLISHED ON MICROFICHE

Published on microfiche by:

Chadwyck-Healey Ltd
45 South Street
Bishops Stortford
Herts CM23 3AG
England

Somerset House
417 Maitland Avenue
Teaneck
New Jersey 07666
USA

Date of publication and production of master: 1975

Series: The purpose of this series is to make available those catalogues that have lasting interest through their text or their illustrations. Catalogues and cumulations of titles in the series are available from the publishers

Serial numbers: Each title is given a seven-figure serial number in the top right hand corner of the microfiche title strip. This is an accession number. The first figure indicates the number of the list in which the title first appears; the first three-figure group signifies the gallery or museum; the second three-figure group the accession number for that title.

Copyright, microfiche edition: Arts Council of Great Britain and Chadwyck-Healey Ltd, 1975

Technical data:

Producing laboratory: Micromedia Ltd, Kidlington, Oxford.

# ENGLISH CHURCHYARD SCULPTURE

BRIEF NOTES ON A NEGLECTED CRAFT AND ITS PRACTITIONERS

*by*

FREDERICK BURGESS

*The historical material shown in the exhibition forms part of the collection of Frederick Burgess, the organizer of the display, with some examples contributed by Maurice Barley, of Newark, and his former colleague in research, Birkin Haward, of Ipswich, whose help has been invaluable.*

*For the loan of other work, the organizer's thanks are extended to Mrs. Percy Delf Smith, The Guild of Memorial Craftsmen, The Central Council for the Care of Churches, "Sculptured Memorials," The Ministry of Labour, Messrs. Faber and Faber, and many individual craftsmen.*

*Members of the staff and students of Leicester College of Art have been responsible for the casts and lettered tablets shown.*

THIS EXHIBITION presents to the public for the first time a comprehensive review of the carved stones to be found in English churchyards, ranging from the 16th century to the present day. The craftsmen responsible for this great mass of work have until recent years suffered from anonymity; but a considerable number of them have since been identified, and details of their lives and dates determined. It is a matter for regret that they have previously been left obscure, but the examples of their work shown here should accord them recognition as being worthy contributors to our native heritage of stone-carving.

Some facet of the art of one epoch must often wait on posterity for acknowledgement. In this respect, the researches of the late Mrs. Katherine Esdaile rescued from opprobrium the art of the post-Reformation tomb-makers or statuaries, and it is meet to include in these introductory notes on their humbler brethren, a sincere tribute to her memory.

These craftsmen, who included gravestones as part of their working practice, worked necessarily in more modest vein, their patrons being for the most part tradesmen, yeomen, and artisans. Their style of expression ranges from a native idiom of folk-art to the sophisticated ornament in mode; and when the multitude of churchyard monuments be considered as a whole, but a small proportion deserves that well-known sneer of " uncouth rhimes and shapeless sculpture " made by Gray in his *Elegy written in a Country Churchyard.*

The emphasis given to Time's ingredients of crumbling stone and ivy-stranglehold in this famous poem has probably established a conception of the churchyard which discouraged any serious consideration of its monuments as works of art. Gray's description of the churchyard at Stoke Poges conjured up a wilderness, but today, that most-visited of all garths, resembles a garden. It is representative of the general purge of weeds and ivy and care of memorials instigated by the report of the Central Council for the Care of Churches entitled *The Care of Churchyards* published first in 1936; a pamphlet designed to give advice to the clergy on all aspects of the subject.

When traditional gravestone art is examined it will be found that the best period lies within the range of the Georgian period. It is perhaps the lettering which shows the permeation of culture most clearly, for its overall quality is indeed remarkable. A comparison between the monuments of a country churchyard in local stone and their pallid marble fellows in a modern cemetery, makes lamentably clear the subsequent decline in taste and skill.

Imports of marble for sculpture progressively increased after the Reformation, and about the latter nineteenth century, when large interior sculpture was no longer in vogue, white Italian marble memorials, often ready-carved by foreign workmen, began to be imported. Lettering and ornament became no longer the work of an individual, which no doubt contributed to the loss of pride in craft, and accompanying decline in skill.

It was not until 1925 that a commission appointed by the Council of Industrial Art published a report on the degraded condition of this ancient craft, entitled *The Art of Graveyard Monuments*. Acting on the ideals it expressed, an organization of clergy, architects and sculptors was formed to put them into practical effect. That great craftsman, Eric Gill, was an associate of this group, which since its inception has produced much fine work, and functions today under the title of "Sculptured Memorials." A most important step was taken in 1944, when the Guild of Memorial Craftsmen was formed, its membership available for carvers, designers and masons, whose standard of craftsmanship expressed in practice its principles of good design and sound workmanship. Its aims include the provision of expert advice on memorials, the encouragement of improved public taste by means of published literature, and the protection and improvement of status of the mason and designer.

This contemporary organization, based on the model of the medieval Guild, is making a major contribution in its own field towards re-establishing that taste and skill which make the best periods of our English heritage of sculpture a matter for national pride.

## THE EXHIBITION.

This exhibition has two aims:

1. By introducing the work of unknown craftsmen of the past, to achieve a wider public recognition for their merits, and accord them an honourable place in the history of English craftsmanship.

2. To encourage a general improvement of design in modern memorials, and the use of British stone cut by native craftsmen.

The illustrations are arranged under the following headings:

1. The churchyard.
2. Quarries and Methods of working stone.
3. The various types of Monuments.
4. Local and individual styles and treatments of Monuments.
5. The development of Lettering.
6. The use of Symbolism.
7. Ornament and Decoration.
8. The work of individual master-craftsmen.
9. Good contemporary work by Societies and individuals.

Many of the quarries from which are extracted the stone for exterior monuments have been in use for centuries; and the character of the stone determines to a great extent the delicacy or vigour of the carving. Modern machinery has helped to lighten the burden of labour, particularly in sawing and surfacing stone. There exists a harmony of texture and material between the old churches and garths, which is broken when foreign materials such as marble becomes an intruder, as is so evident in the modern

cemetery. The form of monuments may be derived eventually from the early megalithic tombs of our country, but their immediate resemblances are related to Gothic and Classic prototypes. Thus there is the Chest-tomb (a stone box or plinth with moulded ledger), similar to the medieval effigy base, or in more elaborate form resembling the classical sarcophagus: the Altar-tomb (a slab or ledger supported by uprights); and the Headstone, which is the most common form of monument. The treatment of some memorials suggests a derivation from wooden originals, which in former times may have been more numerous than those in stone.

The areas of distribution of the mason's products are related to geological and geographical conditions rather than county boundaries, for transport was effected by water whenever possible. The differences of style to be discerned, considering the rather limited character of the symbolism and ornament, are as various as the temperament of the masons themselves. A man's output may consist of only a few stones, to be found in the vicinity of his native village, or be widely distributed over several counties; his style may be slightly "out-of-date," or fully abreast of current fashion.

Ornament derives from the architectural styles in vogue, and its adjustment to the lettering borrows much from the more elaborate monuments within the church by a certain snobbery of imitation. It must not be forgotten that the gravestone-makers often made the wall-tablets to be found within our churches.

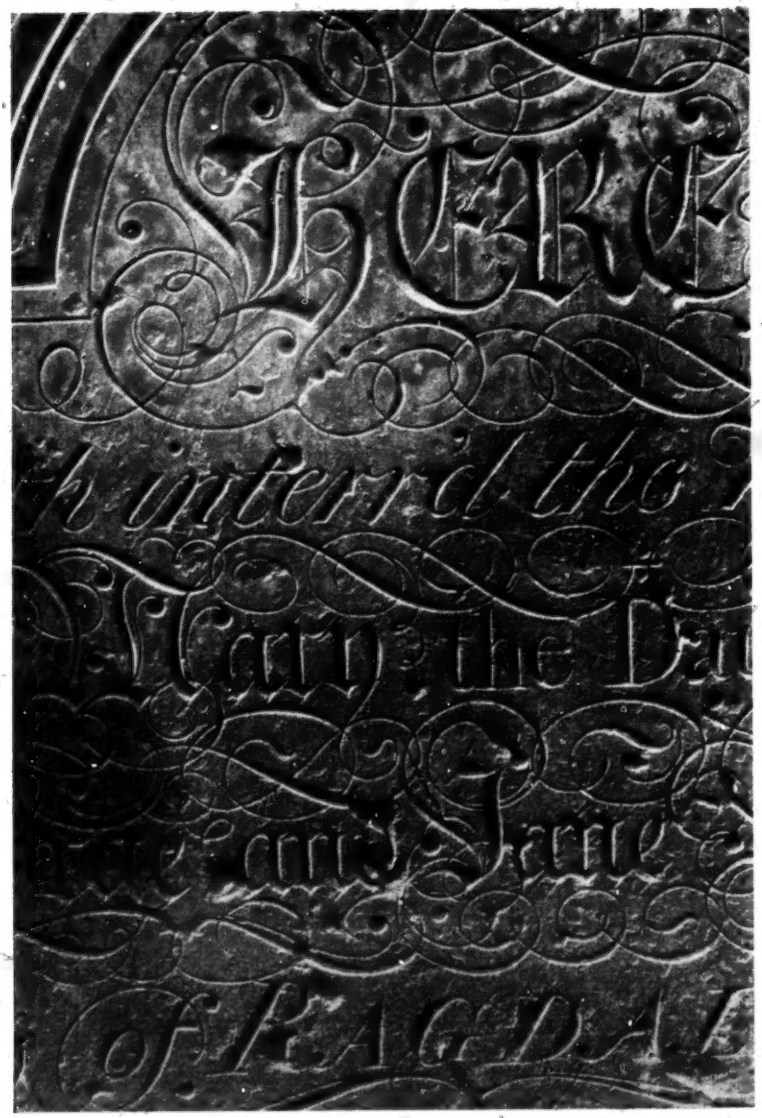
Broadly speaking, the scheme of symbolism is simple, and can be summarized as follows:

Emblems of Mortality and Time, such as skulls, bones, sexton's tools, and the ubiquitous hourglass, are usual in the 17th century, and continue to be used in association with the angel's head signifying Resurrection in the next, as well as other classical emblems such as the torch, the lamp, wreath, serpent, and Chronos or Father Time. Towards the end of the 18th century, the urn becomes the central emblem in the majority of cases, whilst the weeping mourner under her willow tree, and the shattered flower are much esteemed. At the beginning of the Victorian era such classical imagery was condemned as pagan; monuments resumed a Gothic form, and the Cross became the universal emblem. One can often find, however, numerous exceptions to this iconography which provide attractive surprises. Although the cross, for instance, is exceedingly rare in the 18th century, owing to its "popish" associations, emblems of the Passion are to be found on the Midland slates, which were perhaps derived from books of emblems popular at the time, such as those of Francis Quarles, whose verses, along with those of Blair and Young, provided material for epitaphs.

Biblical subjects were represented towards the end of the 18th century, and are most common in the Vale of Evesham, East Anglia and the South-Eastern counties. The Methodist Revival may have inspired such themes, of which the favourites are the Last Judgement, the Sacrifice of Isaac, and the Good Samaritan.

Come
Blessed
Here lieth ye body of
Mr JOHN OLIVER he departed
this life Octeber ye 30 day 1723
in the 50 year of his age
O Sad and Crewell Death that would not spare
A loving husband and a tender father dear
Great is the loss to those hee hads left behind
But hee no dout Eternall ioyes will find
See Meuer More Delay Divide Mr from
Thy glorious Grace and let thy Kingdom Come

WHATTON (NOTTINGHAMSHIRE) 1723



SYSTON (LEICESTERSHIRE) 1747
*detail of lettering on slate*

DENTON (LINCOLNSHIRE) 1770
*by Christopher Staveley, of Melton Mowbray*

LEICESTER (ST. MARY DE CASTRO)
*detail of relief in slate by Christopher Staveley of Melton Mowbray*

LINTON (HEREFORDSHIRE) 1726

LINTON (HEREFORDSHIRE) 1764

LEICESTER (ST. MARY DE CASTRO)
*detail of relief in slate by William Firmadge of Leicester*

BILLINGSHURST (SUSSEX) 1800
*detail of relief in Portland stone*

Following an ancient practice, there are numerous stones bearing tools or symbols of the deceased's trade or profession, some of which have well-known punning epitaphs.

Lettering shows both the influence of hand-writing and typography. The calligraphic revival of the 17th and 18th centuries which led to the production of many copy-books by the contemporary writing-masters was responsible for the magnificent virtuosity of the Midland slates in the 18th century. In the next, experiments in typography superseded script, and were adapted by the West country and Midland masons. Many of these bizarre type-faces which are unpleasant in print, have an attractive quality when cut in slate. The Gothic Revival reverted to medieval versals and church-script or black-letter, but after the middle of the 19th century there is a lamentable decline in lettering. The re-introduction in recent years of traditional Roman alphabets and italics, assisted by the labours of such great craftsmen as Eric Gill and Percy Delf Smith, have done much to heal this broken tradition.

The general standard of education possessed by the older craftsmen must be credited as higher than popular prejudice allows. The subject of epitaphs cannot be dealt with here; it needs a serious monograph to deal with its literary sources, as most books on the subject only emphasize the quaint and curious, but there exist many texts in Latin, Greek, or even Hebrew correctly rendered, and a choice of quotations, to show that many of these men were the reverse of illiterate. They include builders or minor

architects such as Christopher Staveley (1726-1801), of Melton Mowbray, who built Stapleford church in the Gothick manner ; his apprentice, James Wallis (1747-1824), of Newark, who started his career as a gravestone-carver ; John Morris, of Lewes, who built Glynde church, or Robert Corney (1704-1771), of East Cotham, who put up Kirkleatham church and its mausoleum.

Other masons, such as the Harstons of Newark, the Bells of Leicester, and the Sparrows of Stamford, practised also as painters, and among these men surely James Andrews (1735-1817), of Olney, was most fortunate, as for several years he associated with one of our great poets, William Cowper, teaching him drawing, and being styled " his Michelangelo."

Members of a family sometimes worked at different trades, such as the numerous Rudkins of Mountsorrel, who were slaters, brickmakers, and masons ; the Hazelgroves of Shoreham, who worked both in brick, wood and stone ; or Jonathan Harmer of Heathfield, who, after working with his brother as a painter and builder in America, returned to England and made terracotta plaques for decorating gravestones.

Tradition was maintained by the apprenticeship system, the pupil often marrying into the master's family, whilst the craft was handed down from father to son, so that it is by no means uncommon to find masons in practice today whose forbears have worked in the craft for centuries.

For the majority of masons gravestones were only an item of their products, but some, like the Hind family of Swithland and

Whetstone (who were part-owners of the nearby quarries) ; James Sparrow of Radcliff, and Thomas Wood (1760-1841), of Bingham, seemed to have relied chiefly on their memorial output.

Incidentally, the work of the last two Nottinghamshire carvers could be used to depict a miniature history of the changes in taste and style during the Georgian period ; Sparrow's work ranges from restraint to elegance, and some of Wood's landscapes have a pastoral quality that can only be compared with the work of Samuel Palmer.

The opening of canals in the latter part of the 18th century enabled masons to open shops in two or more towns. The Neale family, for instance, had depots at Melton Mowbray, Grantham and Stamford, and had not only a large gravestone trade, but were, in effect, general contractors.

The occurrence of signatures signifies not only pride in achievement but trade competition. It is most unwise to base an opinion upon some single example of a masons' work, as the amount of ornament was adapted to the price paid, and there is evidence to show that the customer did not scruple to haggle. Again, the popular notion that these men ignored time and money in their labours is fallacious ; the competition and hurly-burly was there, as it always will be, but they rose above it by virtue of their taste and skill.

Whereas the Georgian mason was both his own designer and carver, during the Victorian period the break with the Classical tradition, led to both clergy and architects acting as his Gothic

advisors. The issue of pattern-books led to loss of originality, and the later imports of foreign memorials did much to reduce masons from artists to mere tradesmen, or "case-openers" as they are called today. The aim of the modern Revival is to remedy this state of affairs and produce a general rise in standards of design, which although necessarily based on conventional models, may soon evolve its own particular symbolism, adapted to contemporary feeling, and thus garnish tradition with judicious experiment.

## BRIEF BIBLIOGRAPHY.

*Gravestones in Midland Churchyards;* Canon J. M. Blake; Birmingham Archael. Soc. Trans. vol. 51; 1925.

*Gravestone Memorials in Stone and Wood;* Oxford University Press; 1934.

*The Care of Churchyards;* (Report by the Central Council for the Care of Churches); 1st edition 1936.

*Rude Forefathers;* Innes Hart; Architectural Review, Nov., 1939.

*Swithland Slate Headstones;* A. Herbert; Leicester Archael. Soc. Trans. vol. 22, pt. 3; 1943/4.

*Slate Headstones in Nottinghamshire;* M. W. Barley; Thoroton Soc. Trans. vol. 52, 1948.

*English Sepulchral Monuments;* Fredk. Burgess; *The Monumental Journal;* a series of monthly articles dealing with the complete history of the subject; begun in 1941, still in progress.

## POSTSCRIPT.

Some of the work shown in this exhibition is in danger of being lost in the course of a few years, owing to weathering. Notable cases include some of the magnificent Forest of Dean stones in the Vale of Evesham, the work of the Laughton family of Cleeve Prior, Samuel Hobday of Honeybourne, and Francis Ballard of Littleton (1751-1811). Decay offers a cogent reason for recording churchyard sculpture ; and it is to be hoped that private individuals or members of learned societies may take up the task. Copies of masons' signatures on both interior tablets and gravestones, dates from their own memorials, or archival information, will help greatly towards making possible the publication by subscription of an illustrated biographical index of the older craftsmen. This work is being prepared by the organizer of the exhibition, Frederick Burgess. He will be grateful to receive any such notes or general enquiries, which may be addressed to him c/o The Guild of Memorial Craftsmen, Royal Institute Galleries, 195, Piccadilly, London, W.1.

*The illustrations, loaned through the courtesy of the "Monumental Journal," are the organizer's property and copyright.*

GEO. J. HIEATT AND SON
- *Printers* -
HIGH STREET - REIGATE